

## **BYERS GILL SOLAR FARM PROJECT**

### **NOTES FOR 24<sup>TH</sup> JULY OPEN MEETING**

#### **INTERESTED PARTY REFERENCE NUMBER 20047679**

#### **SIZE AND LOCATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT**

The very large size of the proposed development is totally inappropriate for a site so close to residential properties in the rural village of Bishopton, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Byers Gill and Brafferton. The visual impact of such a huge industrial solar farm would fundamentally change the tranquil character of the area.

We consider solar farms should be appropriately located and not on productive agricultural land, or in an area which will cause significant visual impact to the residents and those further afield who visit the area.

The proposed solar farm which forms the subject of this DCO would cover approx. 793 acres of the rural landscape surrounding Bishopton, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Byers Gill and Brafferton with solar panels, Battery Storage Units (BESS) and associated structures. The is split into parcels and connected by underground cabling from Brafferton to Letch Lane Bulk Supply Point Stockton on Tees.

It is difficult to assess the number of solar panels that will be installed and the actual arrangement rows of the panels in rows due to the lack of detailed design to date. The solar panels, Battery Storage Units (BESS) and associated structures will be enclosed with fences within all the agricultural fields making up the site.

The development would also require an indetermined number of structures the size of tall shipping containers. Some would be in a group next to a new substation within the 4 number areas A to F and would house Lithium battery storage units. The remainder would be dotted throughout the sites and would house transformers and inverters to turn low voltage direct current into high voltage alternating current suitable for the national grid. Access tracks would be provided throughout the sites.

We acknowledge that there is a pressing need to increase renewable energy generating capacity in this country, and that solar farms bring important benefits in terms of reducing carbon emissions and assisting with security of supply. Unsurprisingly, a solar farm on the scale proposed here (sized to benefit from being classed as a 'nationally significant infrastructure') can generate a large amount of electricity from renewable sources. However, the inevitable consequence is that a very large area of land is required. In this case, that is land which national policy dictates should be kept permanently free from development. At the local level, protection of the rural environment and the green belt are fundamental to the vision and objectives of the Darlington Borough Council local plan.

Despite the adoption of various high-level strategies emphasising the need to increase renewable energy generation to achieve 'net zero', the government has not seen fit to relax green belt policy in favour of such developments. On the contrary: the government has made clear that proposals for all types of renewable energy development remain subject to existing green belt policy.

Moves beyond general statements of support for solar development to the more specific policy intended to guide the determination of planning applications, the support is not unqualified. There is no general support for locating solar farms in the green belt and in locations where the significance of designated heritage assets will be harmed.

#### **SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE VISUAL IMPACT FOR RESIDENTS LIVING ADJACENT TO THE SITE BOUNDARIES**

There are several residential properties located close to the site boundary. The development will have a significant adverse visual impact to these properties, especially from first floor windows. This includes existing and new housing along Low Moor Lane and Scotton Old Hall.

We consider the proposed development contravenes Darlington Borough Councils Local Plan Policy which requires development proposals to be designed to ensure that they do not result in significant adverse impacts on the amenity of occupiers and neighbours.

## **NEGATIVE VISUAL IMPACT FOR USERS OF THE PUBLIC FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS ACROSS THE SITE**

The sites are crossed by several Public Rights of Way, they are well used by walkers and cyclists from the local area, as well as people from further afield and surrounding villages.

Currently there are extensive open views of green fields and agricultural farmland. The development would create significant adverse visual impact along the footpath and bridleway, with arrays of 3.5m high dark coloured solar panels which would tower above walkers blocking those views. The footpath and bridleway would be separated from the site by a 2.5m high security fence. The solar panels and fencing would destroy the wide, open views and create an unpleasant tunnel along the footpath and bridleway, degrading the amenity value.

We consider the proposed development contravenes Darlington Borough Councils Local Plan Policy which states that proposals affecting Public Rights of Way will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the routes and the recreational and amenity value of the Public Rights of Way will be protected, or satisfactory diverted routes that deliver a level of recreational and amenity value at least as good as the routes being replaced are provided.

## **NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

The solar farm would significantly adversely impact the character and appearance of the landscape. The expansive tranquil landscape of open green fields with far reaching views would turn into a semi-industrial, utility-grade power complex, with fields of 3m high dark solar panels, shipping containers containing electrical equipment and security fencing.

We consider the proposed development contravenes Darlington Borough Councils Local Plan Policy which requires that development proposals protect, enhance or restore the landscape character of the area for its own intrinsic beauty and for its benefit to the environmental and social well-being of the district. This will be achieved by requiring that development proposals protect and/or enhance the character, appearance and local distinctiveness of the landscape and consider the ambiance of the area and requiring that visually sensitive skylines and visual amenity are protected and/or enhanced.

## **LOSS OF PRODUCTIVE ARABLE LAND**

It is very important to prevent good quality land being lost to development to allow food to be grown in the UK and to reduce the reliance on imported food. Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) is a system used in England and Wales to grade the quality of land for agricultural use. It is used to inform planning decisions affecting greenfield sites, to protect good quality land from development.

We consider the proposed development contravenes Darlington Borough Councils Local Plan Policy which states that the best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) will be protected from development not associated with agriculture or forestry except where it can be demonstrated to be necessary.

## **LOSS OF LOCAL WILDLIFE HABITATS**

Large solar farms such as that being proposed for Bishopton and surrounding villages, have the potential to have a transformative effect on the land which could have consequences for local wildlife. For example, studies have suggested that birds can mistake the mirror like glare from solar panels for water and collide into the panels when trying to land with deadly consequences.

The RSBP have reported that insects that lay eggs in water may mistake solar panels for water bodies due to reflection of polarised light. Under certain circumstances insects have been found to lay eggs on the solar panel surfaces which has the potential to impact their reproductive biology. In addition, security fencing around the site could become a barrier to the movement of wild mammals and amphibians and represent a collision risk for some bird species.

## **UNACCEPTABLE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON LOCAL HERITAGE**

Given the extent of the proposed solar array, this development is likely to be visible across a very large area and could negatively impact heritage assets near the site. These include Royal Flying Corp Airfield on Folly Bank top and the Bishopton Castle.

We consider the proposed development contravenes Darlington Borough Councils Local Plan Policy which states that proposals affecting a heritage asset, or its setting, should protect or enhance those features which contribute to its special architectural or historic interest.

## **NOISE AND VIBRATION IMPACT**

The Bishopton construction stage alone will last 12 months and will involve articulated lorries, HGV's and vans transporting materials to site. The access route to the site hasn't been confirmed, but the roads through the village of Bishopton are extremely narrow and have houses directly on either side of the road which will be significantly impacted by the noise and vibration caused by the very large increase in HGV traffic during the construction phase.

One of the proposed access points to the site is directly opposite Bishopton Redmarshall Primary School, in addition it is proposed that a battery storage and power conversion plant will be located on land opposite the primary school. This will involve installing large shipping containers and equipment via crane. It is considered that there will be significant effects of noise and vibration on the primary school during the construction phase.

## **NEGATIVE EFFECT ON TOURISM AND LOCAL BUSINESSES**

The area is currently enjoyed by walkers, cyclists, residents, and those travelling from further afield. This area is part of the local popular walks which may see less visitors to the area locally and further afield, potentially affecting business such as pubs and activity facilities in Bishopton and other neighbouring villages. The solar farm development would turn a pleasant and rural area into an industrialised area protected by CCTV cameras and high fencing with warning signs, which are far from welcoming to those who currently benefit from the quiet and unspoilt public access pathway and bridleways.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT IS NOT TEMPORARY**

The proposed lease of the site would be for a period of 40 years which is a considerable period. The construction of a solar farm the size of the proposed development at Byers Gill Solar Farm Sites will cost JBM millions of pounds and it is very unlikely that the site will ever be returned to its current agricultural use, therefore there is no weight to any claims that the development is temporary and can be reversed.

## **NO BENEFIT TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

The proposed development won't benefit the local community. The power generated by the solar panels will go straight to the national grid – this will not be a source of cheap electricity for people living in the vicinity of the solar farm. Residents living adjacent to the site will have a significant adverse visual impact from the site, whilst there will also be a loss of the rural amenity of the extensive open views along the footpath and bridleway crossing the site.

## **CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

Whilst residents generally support the need for renewable energy sources, it is felt that the number of proposals for solar farms in the area around Bishopton is excessive and the plans could open the areas for housing or industrial development in the future. Generally, residents and parish councillors feel that this application brings very little in the way of benefits to the residents.

Both the approved and proposed large number of developments together with the Wind Farms already operational will industrialise the Borough Parishes of Darlington and Stockton-on-Tees and change their whole description from being known as semi-rural. It will change the use of the land to brownfield sites, will

cause untold disruption to the local network during construction bringing further misery to residents already suffering the knock-on effects of other local developments.

There are already 5 number solar farms, and 2 number Wind Farms existing and another 7 solar farms are proposed for this and surrounding area, and should this application be approved, the surrounding villages will be wrapped in what would be close to one/two million solar panels.

JBM have not acknowledged the planned proposals for other sites located around Bishopton and nearby villages in their development proposal. The result should the proposed sites be approved will be that Bishopton, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Byers Gill and Brafferton will be surrounded with solar panels and destroying Conservation Villages and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

### **CONSTRUCTION AND CONSTRUCTION TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT**

The proposed development will create significant transport impacts on the local road network during development. The construction stage is stated to be 52 weeks i.e., 12 months for sites E and F alone and will involve the delivery of an extremely large number of solar panels and mounting infrastructure, as well as shipping containers containing electrical equipment via articulated lorries, HGVs, and vans. All of which for site F will access the site via Church View (a narrow road with parking on both sides) and Mill Lane (a single-track road) which will also house the construction compound. It is a busy route used for School drop off traffic and it also serves several businesses whose operations will be severely restricted by the construction traffic.

The access route to the sites have not been confirmed, but the roads through the villages are extremely narrow with houses directly on either side of the road.

The villages are popular with walkers, cyclists, pedestrians, and horse riders and are already overburdened and totally unsuitable for large vehicles.

In addition, access to Bishopton via Mill Lane will involve vehicles using a B road which is restricted to vehicles over 7.5 tons along the entire stretch between Bishopton and Whitton. Quite apart from the restriction of 7.5 tons, HGVs are unable to navigate the tight and narrow bends at Bishopton Mill.

Church View and Mill Lane roads also provide vehicle access to the village primary school and the village playground. Resulting in a safety issue for children that is potentially extremely dangerous and unsuitable.

There will also be significant transport disruption when the underground cabling is installed in Bishopton and Redmarshall Road Lane, Redmarshall Village, Carlton Village and Letch Lane before connecting the site to Letch Lane Bulk Supply Point for grid connection

The size and location of the development had been made without site visits and is based on which Farm/landowners were interested in the advertisement for land lease. Published by or on behalf of JBM.

There are concerns regarding the foundations to the 200/500 properties in the villages that due to the era in which they were built do not have substantial foundations that would cope with the added vibrations generated by both the Construction traffic and piling machines. RWE have not made comment on this problem.

The very large size of the proposed development is totally inappropriate for a site so close to residential properties in the rural villages. The visual impact of such a huge industrial solar farm would fundamentally change the tranquil character of the area. We consider solar farms should be appropriately located and not on productive agricultural land, or in an area which will cause significant visual impact to the residents and those further afield who visit the area.

### **OTHER ISSUES.**

There are several other issues which to date have never been agreed with the developer RWE/JBM.

- a) The effect of the development on openness of the rural farmland and whether any benefits of the scheme amount to very special circumstances and clearly outweigh any harm.
- b) The effect of the proposals upon the significance of designated heritage assets by way of effects upon their settings, and whether any public benefits are sufficient to outweigh any harm(s)
- c) National policy requires that harm to the farmland areas must be given substantial weight and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It is incumbent on RWE/JBM to show that the harm to the area by reason of inappropriateness, and the other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. The proposal would cause the following rural area and 'other' harm:
  - d) 'Definitional' harm resulting from inappropriate development in the rural area. This is common ground. Harm to the openness of the rural area, both in spatial and visual terms. Again, it is common ground that such harm would occur. Self-evidently, the placing of a massive number of solar panels within 2.8m high fenced enclosures, together with associated infrastructures, will cause significant harm to the openness of the rural area across this large site.
  - e) This will be plain to see from the well-used network of public footpaths/Prows and Bridal ways which criss-cross the site. The visualisation provided for footpath from Bishopton to Old Stillington illustrates the type of effect that will occur. Whilst solar panels are 'low lying' compared with a typical building, at a height of 3.5m these structures would be taller than the people who would walk alongside and between them (the panels would be around twice an average person's height, for example. RWE/JBM describes the effect on openness as 'localised', but that must be understood in the context of a site which covers 793 acres and is easily bigger than the nearest villages (Bishopton, Great Stainton, Little Stainton and Brafferton, the effect should not be downplayed.
  - f) Harm to green belt purposes; specifically, the proposal undermines the role of the green belt in protecting the countryside from encroachment. Again, this is common ground.
  - g) Harm to the character of the local landscape. RWE/JBM assessment is that there will be a major-moderate adverse effect on the Sites A to F for 10 years, reducing to a moderate and adverse effect for the remaining 30 years of the temporary planning permission. It is therefore easily understood that harm to landscape character will occur. The Parish Council does dispute the RWE/JBM assessment of landscape (or visual) impacts, Harm to the significance of heritage assets, through development in their settings.
  - h) The proposed solar farm lies within the setting of a scheduled monument and a registered Playground/Park. There is a statutory duty to have "special regard" to the desirability of preserving an English Heritage Site or its setting. Preservation in this context means avoiding harm. If a proposed development would cause harm, that must be given regarding granting planning permission.  
There is no equivalent statutory duty in respect of scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens, however the NPPF adopts a unified approach to all designated heritage assets, which is consistent with the statutory duty for listed buildings. It is our belief that the proposed solar farm would cause harm to the significance of Bishopton Castle.

### **Risk Assessments**

It is very clear that RWE/JBM have not carried out full risk assessments on the project and its constituent parts/materials or made any reference to HSE Guidelines in their DCO.

An extract from HM Planning website includes the following:

"The methodology used by HSE when providing land use planning advice is based on the following principles:

- The risk considered is the residual risk which remains after all reasonably practicable preventative measures have been taken to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and its relevant statutory provisions.

- Where it is beneficial to do so, advice takes account of risk as well as hazard, that is the likelihood of an accident as well as its consequences.
- Account is taken of the size and nature of the proposed development, the inherent vulnerability of the exposed population and the ease of evacuation or other emergency procedures for the type of development proposed. Some categories of development (eg schools and hospitals) are regarded as more sensitive than others (e.g. light industrial), and advice is weighed accordingly.
- Consider the risk of serious injury, including that of fatality, attaching weight to the risk where a proposed development might result in many casualties in the event of an accident.
- This methodology has been codified within [HSE's Planning Advice Web App HSL](#), which planning authorities and developers can use on-line to obtain HSE advice on planning applications and pre-planning enquiries.”

The above extracts are the minimum that should be adhered to when planning a project with so many built in dangers and risk to life particularly when focusing on BESS and large quantities of Lithium batteries near residents

BESS Installations and locations are of particular concern to all residents throughout the five (5) villages and numerous farms close to the BESS Containers.

National Fire Brigades are concerns are indicated in the extracts from the Guidelines they are publishing.

“This guidance has been developed with the safety of the public and emergency responders in mind. It is based on trying to help reduce the risk as far as reasonably practicable, whilst recognising that ultimate responsibility for the safe design and running of these facilities rests with the developer and operator”

“The choice of BESS site and the associated safety measures should account for the impact that an incident on the site could have on the local environment. A plan should be prepared to assist in discussions with developers and planners regarding the suitability of a site location highlighting all sensitive receptors within a 1km radius of the site to allow for appropriate emergency planning”

The Fire Prevention Plans: Environmental Permits Guidance provides examples of sensitive receptors that may include:

- Schools, hospitals, nursing and care homes, residential areas, workplaces.
- Protected habitats, watercourses, groundwater, boreholes, wells and springs supplying water for human consumption. Further habitat information can be found on the DEFRA MAGiC map website.
- Roads, railways, bus stations, pylons (on or immediately adjacent to the site only), utilities, airports.

Individual site designs will mean that distances between BESS units and occupied buildings / site boundaries will vary. Proposed distances should consider risks including the impact of any vapour cloud and any mitigation factors that have been incorporated into the site design.

RWE/JBM should have plans showing all sensitive receptors within a 1km radius of the BESS units that could be affected by a fire. Examples of sensitive receptors may include:

- Schools, hospitals, nursing and care homes, residential areas, workplaces.
- Protected habitats, watercourses, groundwater, boreholes, wells and springs supplying water for human consumption – further habitat information can be found on the Defra MAGiC map website.
- Roads, railways, bus stations, pylons (on or immediately adjacent to the site only), utilities, airports

I have little doubt that the battery suppliers / installers etc will be responding with their vested interests, trying to play down the hazards – and risks (the two are not the same) - as minimal. We know they are not, and the evidence points that way. So, our response is, Issues like separation distances are not totally technical; for example, the previous edition of the NFCC Guidance talked in terms of a 6m separation between BESS units. Now there's a suggestion by developers and within the developer lead guidance committee that less than 1m may be sufficient if the assumption that a BESS fire can or will be contained within one unit is correct. Again, the evidence available fails to support that.

Concern has been raised regarding Bess and Lithium battery fires which are currently being regularly reported in the news. There do not appear to be any realistic design reports on Fire, Fire Brigade response and Methods of response for a system with a history of overheating, fires, Toxic gases and explosions from Lithium batteries in the developers submitted DCO, all of which represent a serious and possibly fatal threat to the health and wellbeing of the local population. The developers suggested a design proposal to mitigate the issues associated with the likelihood of Lithium generated chemical driven fires will not provide safety to residents who live within the vicinity of the Bess storage units.

Gases produced by the fires will be harmful and health threatening in various degrees for 5Km from the fire and to various degrees ranging from fatal to permanent damage to lung functions. This has been identified by several prominent professors from Oxford, Cambridge and Newcastle universities in published papers and documents together with various documents published by I.O.W and Hampshire Fire Services.

The government has to date failed to provide any guidelines for BESS Design and manufacture that ensure good and safe practices.

### **BIODIVERSITY**

Biodiversity calculations are based on a flawed calculation method, the proposed outcome and levels will not be achieved and in fact the values will be negative not positive as claimed by the developer. The developer's design refers to outlying sites for wild fowl etc. as part of their calculation on biodiversity. These sites are approximately 20 miles distant and do not replace the direct benefits currently available to the local population of the 4 villages being damaged by the development.

### **HEALTH ISSUES**

The Application does not address Health Issues which are becoming an inherent part of all planning applications for this type of development. The UK has failed to implement any type of investigations into the possible side effects on the Human population although there are reports of results available in the USA a country that has had Solar far longer than the UK. The information available is cause for some concern as mental wellbeing including anxiety and anguish form a large part of the potential impact generated by the poorly located planned solar farm.

### **BENEFITS. /CUMULATIVE EFFECTS/LACK OF CONSULTATION**

- a) The proposed solar farm would supply the national grid, so a rural farming area location is not necessary or inevitable: the DAS confirms that this is "one of several solar farm battery storage proposals being brought forward by the Applicant across England and Wales". Renewable energy generation need not come at the expense of the loss of farmland.
- b) The other claimed benefits, alone or in combination, barely move the dial towards justifying the harms I have already discussed. They attract, at best, limited weight in the planning balance and appear unlikely to affect the outcome of this application.

- c) Cumulative effects have been dismissed by RWE/JBM and not considered in their DCO submission. There are 12 proposed solar farms proposed in the area and the developer does not address the issues associated with cumulative effect. The presence of so many solar farms will industrialize rural farming areas and Conservation Villages. 4 of these sites have been approved to date together with 2 Wind Turbine sites. which are currently fully operational.
- d) Whilst residents generally support the need for renewable energy sources, it is felt that the number of proposals for solar farms in the area around Bishopton is excessive and the plans could open the areas to industrial development in the future. Generally, residents and parish councillors feel that this application brings very little in the way of benefits to the residents.
- e) Both the approved and proposed large number of developments together with the Wind Farms already operational will industrialize the Local Parishes and change their whole description from being known as rural. It will change the use of the land to brownfield sites, will cause untold disruption to the local network during construction, bringing further misery to residents already suffering the knock-on effects of other local developments.
- f) JBM have not acknowledged the planned proposals for other sites located around Bishopton and nearby villages in their development proposal. The result should the proposed sites be approved will be that Bishopton, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Byers Gill and Brafferton will be surrounded with solar panels and destroying Conservation Villages and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

**g) CONSULTATION INADEQUACIES**

- h) The Bishopton Villages Action Group have looked at the inadequacies of the consultation report section 5.1 of RWE submission to the National Planning Inspector. Obviously, there is also the glaring inadequacies of the actual consultation being held at this time or any time in the consultation. The residents are of the opinion that it was poorly done during the Supplementary Consultation earlier in 2020 when RWE/JBM carried on with the consultation despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Planned consultation events were cancelled, deposit locations and info points were closed. Yet still RWE/JBM considered it acceptable to continue with the consultation, rather than waiting until it could be held adequately and safely.
- i) We expressed our serious concerns over this, supported by Local Ward Councillors, MP'S Parish Councils and 99.9% of residents in the areas affected by lack of consultation, accurate information and meaningful engagement., etc, yet when it came down to the Design Consultation RWE still didn't take our concerns into account, instead starting the latest consultation amongst the COVID-19 crisis.
- j) Much of the consultation was promoted online. Not everyone has internet connection, computers or Wi-Fi facilities. Many only use mobile phones to access the internet with limited screen viewing capacity, especially for viewing maps etc which are hard enough to work out on a full computer screen.
- k) The physical consultation pack contained a consultation brochure, a Land Use Map and a General Arrangement layout.
- l) The references in the guide as to referring to the maps are of course not possible if you aren't online as you would have to phone or email RWE/JBM to request copies of the full document to be sent, as the consultation meeting information did not include the same Maps or details as being referred to in the brochure.
- m) The RWE/JBM sketch/maps in the pack are on such a scale that it is very difficult to see the level of detail most people would need and want. The Sketch/ maps cannot be zoomed into like the online version, and they are printed on what appears to be A4 size paper. Not enough detail has been provided at any stage.
- n) Only 15? response forms were sent, despite the fact everyone in a household is at liberty to respond. If you use the form online to order the consultation pack there is no option to request additional response forms, you will have to take it upon yourself to email or phone and request



them. The Parish Council requested additional forms and the residents took it on themselves to print 350? forms to hand out to residents,

- o) RWE/JBM also state that only one consultation pack will be sent per household, which we questioned and as far as we are aware as, yet nobody has been refused copies when they have ordered more than one per household. But the fact they state this is off putting and on face value limiting.
- p) One of the sections in the official response form ask you about Environmental impacts. However, in the consultation guide, it refers you to the Environmental Impacts booklet for more info about environmental aspects, which is not sent as a matter of course as part of the consultation pack. The onus is again on the public to have to request a copy separately from the consultation guide.
- q) The Environmental Impacts Update gives lots of references to the Preliminary Environmental Investigation Report (PEIR). The PEIR was a document published back in 2020 as part of the Statutory Consultation and is over 600 pages long plus appendices. Again, not available to those who are not online.
- r) We would also highlight the fact that the development boundary has changed considerably since the original proposal document was issued, so how constant references can be made in the Environmental Impacts Update in 2024, that environmental impacts are negligible since the PEIR is certainly not adequate or acceptable in our opinion. Some areas weren't even in or that near to the development boundary in 2020, so of course the impact would have changed now it is in or adjacent to the development boundary in 2020.
- s) It is also greatly lacking and highly frustrating that we are being repeatedly told that much of the environmental impact aspects that we and others want to know so that we can respond in a meaningful consultation would not be available until the Environmental Statement is published at Development Consent Order (DCO) stage.
- t) Whilst everyone will of course be impacted by the development if it goes ahead, those who would be impacted most on health grounds are also the very same people who were most at risk from COVID-19. Those same people who were most likely also be limited in being able to take part in the consultation, because they will likely be shielding etc.
- u) We have now heard from numerous residents whose property/land would be impacted by the Soar Farm development and who only got a copy of the letter they should have received at the start of consultation from the RWE/JBM Land & Property team, because they have contacted RWE/JBM and requested a copy. Not the first time we and residents have experienced inadequacies relating to letters about RWE/JBM Byers Gill Solar Farm.
- v) There have also been letters sent to residents from the RWE/JBM team about potential impacts to their homes for various reasons and on various levels, which were sent two weeks prior to the consultation starting. The letters stated that their property/land would now be impacted, but provided no info on how or to what scale it would be impacted. These residents had to wait 2/3 weeks to receive a further letter. They were not sent a consultation pack as a matter of course, this had to be requested. The second letters they received provided very little additional info from the first letter, and in some cases, it was a further 2 weeks, some 4/5 weeks in total after receiving the first letter, before they were able to get some answers and proper details from RWE/JBM on how their property would be impacted. Totally stressful and totally inadequate and unacceptable.
- w) The RWE/JBM webinars left a lot to be desired. you can read more about that elsewhere in the document.
- x) There are of course no consultation events able to be held because RWE/JBM refused point blank to do any. So, no further opportunity to be able to ask any of our questions face to face and be able to be shown maps and plans and discuss it in person. Even if you can get online, often that face to face interaction just can't be replaced with phone calls etc because you need to be able to see and point at maps etc.
- y) There is confusion about the proposed highway impacts of the proposed development and the applicant is likely to have significantly understated traffic during the construction period. Traffic generated during the operational period is not assessed at all.
- z) Almost every assessment provided by the RWE/JBM has understated the adverse impacts of the proposed development and/or overstated claimed benefits.

- aa) The application documents and drawings are inconsistent, several failing to represent the full extent of the proposed development and the applicant has repeatedly claimed mitigation for the adverse impacts of the development as enhancement. Proposed mitigation is anyway inadequate to screen or compensate for the adverse impacts of the proposed development,

## **In Conclusion**

- a) RWE/JBM place emphasis on the temporary and reversible nature of the proposed development, which could (and should) be secured by a planning condition. The Parish Council has assessed the scheme on the basis that it would indeed be reversed after 40 years – although, as other parties have observed, there are several scenarios in which that might not happen. In any event, 40 years is a considerable period and will be perceived as effectively permanent by those living in the area. Whilst the possible reversibility of the proposed scheme should be considered, it does not significantly alter the balance to be struck.
- b) The Appellant refers to various policy and strategy documents relating to the generation of renewable energy, all of which support the proposition that this should be accorded significant weight in the balance. Many of these documents are pitched at a high level and do not directly relate to the planning system; where they do, they do not provide support for the delivery of such projects in rural areas. They do not represent material considerations which indicate that the appeal should be allowed notwithstanding the clear development plan conflict. There are no such material considerations in this case.
- c) The proposed solar farm would supply the national grid, so a rural farming area location is not necessary or inevitable: the DAS confirms that this is “one of several solar farm battery Renewable energy generation need not come at the expense of the gloss of farmland.
- d) The Parish Council therefore ask you to recommend that the planning application/DCO is dismissed, and planning permission refused.
- storage proposals being brought forward by the Applicant across England and Wales”. Renewable energy generation need not come at the expense of the gloss of farmland.